

The President's Daily Brief

19 May 1969
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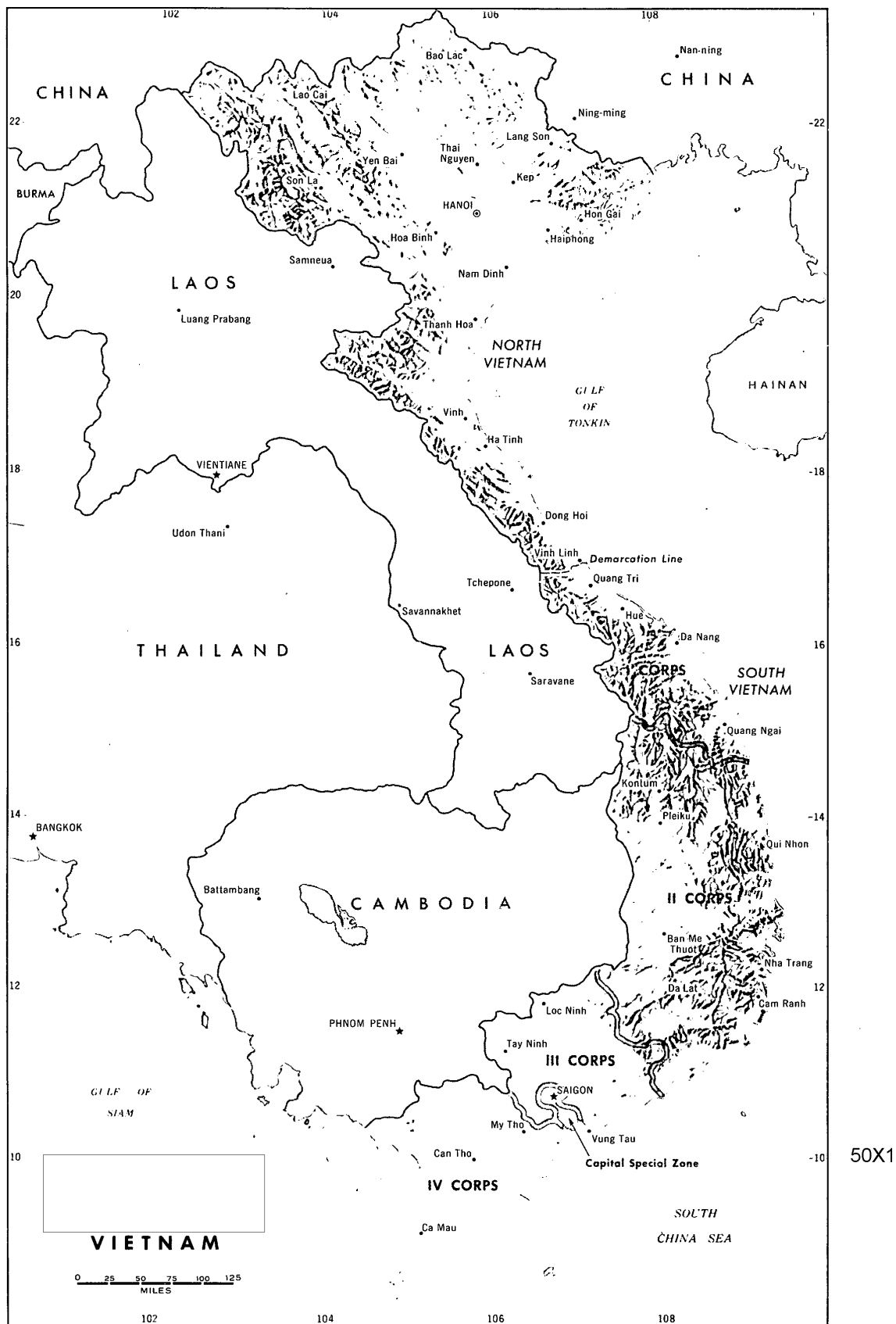
I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

VIETNAM

Hanoi's first authoritative and substantive response to President Nixon's Vietnam address was issued Saturday in a lengthy commentary in Nhan Dan, the party daily. Although it is predictably negative in tone, the commentary, like Communist statements in Paris, does not reject outright any of the President's proposals. In fact, it appears to invite further dialogue by highlighting what Hanoi considers are the central issues and pointing out which features of the US package the Communists object to and why.

The statement focuses on the issues of future political arrangements in South Vietnam and troop withdrawals. As in the Front's ten points, the burden of Hanoi's argument is that the US, as the interloper in South Vietnam, must withdraw completely so that the Vietnamese can organize themselves free from outside coercion and interference. Once this ritualistic point is made, Hanoi goes on to voice doubts about the US proposal for eventual movement of American troops into designated areas. The statement expresses Hanoi's fear that these troops will continue the "military occupation" of South Vietnam as part of the American plan for a political solution.

Hanoi clearly finds Washington's formulations on general elections the most unacceptable of the eight points. The commentary contends that not only did the President ignore the idea of a coalition government, but, in demanding that any



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future participants in the political process in South Vietnam renounce the use of force, he in effect called for a unilateral Communist disarmament while American troops remain in the South and the South Vietnamese Army continues intact. This, Hanoi charges, is tantamount to a Communist surrender to Saigon. On the other hand, the North Vietnamese may have attempted to inject a note of moderation into their handling of the President's declaration that the US has ruled out a military solution in Vietnam. The President's declaration is pointedly acknowledged early in the commentary, which thereafter refrains from repeating the standard propaganda line that the US is intensifying the war.

The Liberation Front's statement, issued a few hours after the Nhan Dan article, is by contrast more strident and polemical. It flatly asserts that the President's initiative is not a "suitable answer" to the NLF's ten points, that it contains nothing constructive, and that it demonstrates a lack of good will. But, like Hanoi, the Front avoids an outright rejection of the US proposals. The NLF clearly is in the role of propagandist while Hanoi is the interlocutor, at least in this first round of Communist responses.

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The level of violence increased over much of South Vietnam during the weekend. The Communists launched a heavy ground attack on the capital of Long Khanh Province, and several small but sharp fights flared in I Corps, where Communist regulars seem to be getting ready to step up the tempo of action even further.

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MIDDLE EAST

Ex-Premier Karami and President Hilu apparently have reached an understanding on the fedayeen. This should clear the way for an attempt by Karami to form a new government. We assume the understanding is based on the proposals Hilu was planning to make to Karami late last week, under which the fedayeen would be allowed to stay in southeastern Lebanon but would agree not to mount operations against Israel from there. Lebanese troops would have secret orders to take action against any terrorists who get out of line.

This arrangement obviously would be extremely fragile. It is not even certain that the Lebanese Muslim community would stick behind Karami once the restraints to be placed on the fedayeen became widely known. Moreover, even if the Muslims held firm, Karami's delicate position would be undermined if the fedayeen became so recalcitrant as to force the army to move against them. The agreement thus depends ultimately on the willingness of the fedayeen to keep out of trouble with the army, and this kind of self-restraint has always been in short supply among them.

EUROPE

The latest poll by the French Institute of Public Opinion shows that on the first ballot Pompidou is down 2 percent (to 41 percent) and Poher up 3 percent (to 37 percent). In addition to indicating a further swing to Poher, this result implies that in the run-off Poher would win by a considerable margin.

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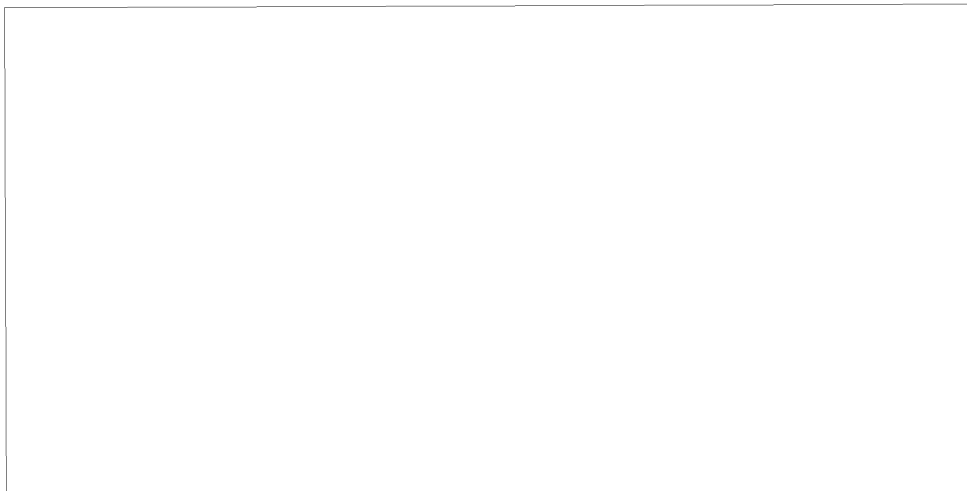
SOVIET AFFAIRS

President Kekkonen and Premier Kosygin are scheduled to meet in Leningrad today. Their primary topic is expected to be a European Security Conference. The idea for such a conference was first proposed at the Budapest meeting of the Communist parties of Eastern Europe and the USSR in March. Recently Finland took it up (whether at Soviet or Finnish initiative is not clear) and sent out a memorandum suggesting Helsinki as the site, participation of the US and both Germanies, with the "German question" a prime subject of discussion. No date was mentioned and, while Kosygin will undoubtedly encourage the Finns to persist in their efforts on behalf of the conference, it is unlikely that Moscow desires to push now for a specific time.

II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

MALAYSIA

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Although the disturbances in Kuala Lumpur have quieted, scattered incidents of looting and arson are still occurring. The government is still not showing much interest in healing the breach between the communities. It has now set up armed vigilante groups--most of them Malay--to supplement the police and the army.

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